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**AFGHANISTAN**

# FIRST PERSON Women Have Their Day in Court

**A Legal Aid Clinic in Afghanistan's western province of Herat helps women's fight for justice**



USAID/I-PACS II

***'My in-laws and my husband started beating me on a regular basis. I'm lucky that this organization heard my voice'***

- Asma, 18

Asma was just 18 when she arrived at Herat's Legal Aid Clinic seeking refuge from an abusive husband. Her family had forced her to marry a man that Asma describes as "a drug addict". When the young bride told her husband that she dreamed of continuing to study, she earned herself a sound beating. "My in-laws and my husband started beating me on a regular basis," Asma told the lawyers at the Legal Aid Clinic as she filed for a divorce.

Asma is one of 224 people, 90 percent of whom are women, who have been helped by this Clinic in a three-month period. Herat's Legal Aid Clinic, operated by local organizations Women Activities and Social Services Association (WASSA) and Social Development and Advocacy Organization (SDA-O), is supported by USAID'S Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society program.

Farya Khateri, a lawyer at the Clinic, says it is a boon for Herat's women. "Often, they are forced into marriage, to settle family debts or disputes." She adds that Afghan women are often subject to the practice of "khoon baha, meaning that if a community member kills someone, he is required to give his daughter to pay the debt and resolve the dispute. Women who try to run away can find themselves imprisoned".

Shaghah Habibi, a member of Herat's primary court, agrees that the province's "traditional" mindset colors the treatment of "cases related to women." But the Clinic provides focused and crucial support to them so that they can have their day in court, he says.